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ABSTRACT

Research on the effect of parent employment on student attendance has been sparse and inconclusive. This paper presents findings of a study that tested the following hypothesis--that students whose parents were at home during school hours would be absent more frequently than students whose parents worked during school hours. The sample was comprised of 82 kindergarten and third-grade students at Malinta Elementary School (Malinta, Ohio), a school with a very low percentage of minority students. The total number of days each child was absent during the 1994-95 school year was tabulated. Students' responses to the question "If you were sick and needed to stay home from school, would there be someone at home to take care of you?" were then compared with school records. A one-tailed t-test failed to find support for the hypothesis. There was no significant difference between the absentee rates of children whose parents were employed and children whose parents were not employed. The study, which focused on elementary school students, did not consider which parent was home or whether parents worked a second or third shift. (LMI)

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Parental Employment
and the Effects on Student Attendance

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Running Head: PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT EFFECTS STUDENT ATTENDANCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gather and report data on the topic of parental employment and student absenteeism. The hypothesis being tested states that students whose parents are at home during school hours (8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.), will be absent more frequently than those students whose parents work during school hours. The subjects are kindergarten and third grade students from Malinta Elementary School that were randomly selected to participate in this study. However, when the data were analyzed using a t-test, there is no support for this hypothesis; $t(80) = +1.472$, $p > .05$, one tailed test. Therefore, based on this study, one cannot conclude that children of employed parents are more frequently absent from school.

Parental Employment
and the Effects on Student Attendance

Over the past several years, researchers have studied how employed parents, especially mothers, effect their children. I found very few studies that addressed the issue of working parents and children's school attendance. One report published by the Educational Research Service on student absenteeism, stated that children were more likely to be absent if their mothers are at home with infants (Porwoll, 1977). If parental employment influences a child's attendance, parents should be made aware of this issue.

Studies between 1930 and 1960 emphasized the negative effects a working mother had on her children. Some of those effects included poor school achievement and poor social adjustment (Crouter, 1982). However, many of these early studies had flaws, like failing to allow for differences in social class, that made some researchers question the validity of these studies (Crouter, 1982). As more research was completed, the findings became inconsistent as to how parental employment effects children. A mother's employment may have a negative effect on the achievement of middle class boys and the effect appears to be negative on white children with two parents. On the other hand, an employed mother may have a positive effect on the achievement of students in lower economic classes and black children (Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsburg, 1986). With other groups, the results of the research vary depending upon age and gender of the child, the family's position in society, and the nature of the mother's work and her attitude toward her work (Crouter, 1982). Few studies have been conducted about father's employment and the effects on the children. Most of the studies that include details about a father's work, just provide clues about the qualities they encourage in their children (Crouter,

1982). In summary, the research is inconsistent on the relationship between working parents, especially mothers, and the effects on their children. One study reported that children are more likely to be absent from school if their mother is staying at home with an infant.

The question this article is addressing is how parental employment effects student attendance. Children of parents unemployed during school hours (8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.) will be absent from school more often than children of parents employed during school hours. A parent unemployed during school hours will be available to supervise their children if they needed to stay home from school. A parent who works second or third shift qualifies for this category.

Method

Subjects

Eighty-two students at Malinta Elementary School in Malinta, Ohio, participated in this study. Forty-one of the students were in kindergarten and the other forty-one students were in the third grade during the 1994-1995 school year. Forty-five of the subjects were male. Malinta School has a very low percentage of minority students; therefore, the number of minority students in kindergarten and third grade was only nine.

Procedures

The sample was chosen from students at Malinta Elementary School. All of the kindergarten students participated in the study and forty-one third graders were randomly selected from a list of fifty-six. Once the students were selected, the total number of days each child was absent during the 1994-1995 school year was tabulated. Each student was then asked the question "If you were sick and needed to stay home from school, would there be someone (mom, dad, or legal guardian) at

home to take care of you?". If the child answered no, they were asked what special arrangements would need to be made. Each answer was then checked against their Emergency Medical Form on file with the school. If the child answered "no" and the daytime phone numbers were different than the home number, the data were considered to be correct. If the child answered "yes", and the daytime phone number corresponded with the home phone number, the data were considered correct. Responses that did not match the above descriptions were investigated further. I called home and asked the parent or guardian the same question that I asked the children.

After the data had been gathered, a t-test was used for analysis. The data were grouped by the number of days absent and parental employment status.

Results

The null hypothesis is $u_1 = u_2$. The alternate hypothesis states $u_1 > u_2$. Where u_1 is the group whose parents are at home during the day. As a result of analyzing the data using a t-test, the data indicate that children whose parents are at home during school hours are not absent more often than those children whose parents work during school hours. The mean days missed for the students whose parents are at home was 5.34 days with a standard deviation of 5.51. While the employed parent children, missed 3.60 days with a standard deviation of 5.10. With t (80) = +1.472, $p > .05$, one tailed, the null hypothesis will fail to be rejected.

Conclusions

The hypothesis of this study stated that children whose parents were at home during school hours were absent from school more often than those children whose parents worked during school hours. However, the data collected failed to support this

hypothesis. The data showed that no significant difference exists in the absentee rates between children whose parents work during the day and those whose parents do not work during the day.

Previous research has declared the effects of working parents on their children to be inconclusive (Crouter, 1982). Most of these studies examined the effects of working mothers only. This study concludes that parental employment has no significant effect of absenteeism. However, this study only looked at if a parent was home during school hours. No mention was made as to which parent was home or if the parent worked second or third shift. Also, this study only focused on elementary students. No investigations were made into junior high or high school students. Both of these topic could be areas of further research.

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